

The Best Tactical RPGs for iPhone and iPad – An RPG Reload Ranking

[October 18, 2017](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)

Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the RPG Reload, the regular feature where our battles to the death are usually turn-based. In each of these columns, we take a look at some aspect of RPG gaming on iOS. Often, it's in the form of a replay or a retrospective, but today I want to try out something new. In the last couple of months, we went through the history of tactical RPGs, from *Dungeons & Dragons* to *Fire Emblem Echoes*. Although I felt that was finished with the end of the historical line, so to speak, I got to thinking this week that these trips through history present us with an opportunity to do something that is often requested of us here at TouchArcade: lists of the best examples of each gaming genre. Consider this, then, your starter set for tactical RPGs on iOS. Are there other excellent ones? You bet! This is just my opinion, after all. But this gives you a place to get started in the genre with some assurance of reasonable quality.

(Revised October 20th, 2017 – Added: Final Fantasy Tactics, XCOM Enemy Within, Warhammer Quest 2; Removed: Swords of Anima, Princess and Knight, Warhammer Quest)

One caveat: I'm only including games that include 64-bit support at the time of writing. The deadline for 32-bit apps has passed, so this list wouldn't be terribly useful if I included those.

I've limited myself to 10 games for this list, and rather than go through the headache of trying to rank them in a particular order, I'm just going to list them alphabetically.

Banner Saga

The Banner Saga

[**Banner Saga, \\$9.99**](#) *Banner Saga* has outstanding production values given the size of its developer, but it's more than just a pretty face. With an emphasis on softening up multiple enemies rather than focusing on killing them off one by one, the battles in *Banner Saga* have a tempo all their own. The game also features some interesting simulation game elements, as you need to manage your caravan as it makes its way across the land. There are also some larger-scale battles that use a different gameplay system, which helps to break up the regular battles. All of that is wrapped up in a dark, well-told story where bad things can and do happen at any time. The sequel is also excellent.

Demon's Rise

Demon's Rise App Preview

[**Demon's Rise, \\$7.99**](#) You won't find much of a story to speak of in *Demon's Rise*, but you will find a great tactical RPG toy box. There are tons of potential party members to choose from for your team, and you can find and buy all sorts of equipment to enhance them. The main campaign is fairly lengthy, and there's a healthy amount of side missions, too. The battle system mechanics draw heavily from Western TRPGs, with elements like cover and mental state being critical considerations if you want to win. The off-beat party options are the biggest thing that separate *Demon's Rise* from the pack, though. There are so many interesting, viable parties to play around with that it's hard to pick. The sequel is also worth checking out.

Final Fantasy Tactics

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS: The War of the Lions (for iPhone) Launch Tr...

[**FINAL FANTASY TACTICS :WotL, \\$13.99**](#) For many Western fans of the TRPG genre, *Final Fantasy Tactics* was their entry point and still stands tall as one of the best in the genre. Its enjoyable job system, twisting narrative, and wonderful soundtrack help it hold that claim even 20 years after its initial release. The mobile version is a fixed-up port of the PSP *War of the Lions* remake, and is to date the best version of this game you can get. If you only own one game on this list, I think you could make a strong case for this being it.

Fire Emblem Heroes

Fire Emblem Heroes - Trailer

[*Fire Emblem Heroes*, Free](#) Even with me being as big a *Fire Emblem* fan as I am, I probably wouldn't have even considered the launch version of *Fire Emblem Heroes* for this list. But I have to hand it to Nintendo, DeNA, and Intelligent Systems. They've been listening to fans and making great additions and changes to the game in the last several months, implementing rules and modes that require good strategic thinking to win. While it's nowhere near as involved as, well, *any* of the normal *Fire Emblem* games, I can certainly appreciate the game's attempt to shrink a traditionally long-winded genre into bite-sized sessions.

Heroes of Steel RPG

Heroes of Steel - Epic Fantasy RPG

[**Heroes of Steel RPG Elite, \\$3.99**](#) While it leans a little more heavily into the RPG genre than some of the others on this list, the tactical battles in *Heroes of Steel* make up the bulk of its gameplay and should be quite familiar to anyone who enjoys the TRPG genre. Since you have a relatively small party of four characters to work with here, the battles are of a slightly smaller scale than some other games in the genre, but with lots of opportunities to build your characters as you see fit, there are enough options on the table to satisfy. This is a very long game that is still being added to by its developer, so there's plenty to do, as well.

Steamworld Heist

SteamWorld Heist: Official HD Trailer - Out Now!

[SteamWorld Heist, \\$0.99](#) Okay, *SteamWorld Heist* isn't exactly a conventional TRPG, but that's part of what makes it so brilliant. You take your team of space-bots through a bunch of side-scrolling stages of turn-based action. When it's time to start shooting, you'll have to line up your shot yourself. Aim well and you can do some pretty spiffy ricochets. The fresh gameplay combined with tons of humor and charm make this a must-own for TRPG fans.

Tactics Maiden

Tactics Maiden - Official Trailer

[**Tactics Maiden, Free**](#) I will never, ever stop extolling the virtues of *Tactics Maiden* and its sister series *Kingturn*. These are fantastic TRPGs that use a lot of conventional elements but feel completely different from the usual thanks to their strong focus on taking and holding certain checkpoints on each map. It makes every battle feel like a tug of war. The story's pretty good, too. There's a ton of content in this one, and you can even try it out for free before buying the rest. Hard to argue with that.

Templar Battleforce RPG

Templar Battleforce - Extended Trailer

[**Templar Battleforce Elite, \\$9.99**](#) While I was making a concerted effort to try to keep developers to one entry each on this list, I feel like *Templar Battleforce* is different enough from *Heroes of Steel* to merit both of them being on here. Clearly inspired by Games Workshop's *Warhammer 40K* universe, *Templar Battleforce* manages to one-up that series's own high-quality TRPG entry in terms of overall quality. Space marines, high-powered weaponry, and enough aliens and ne'er-do-wells to shake a (boom)stick at. What could possibly go wrong?

Warhammer Quest 2

Warhammer Quest 2: The End Times - Gameplay Trailer

[Warhammer Quest 2, \\$4.99](#) *Warhammer Quest 2* is in a lot of ways a new coat of paint on top of the first game, but that's hardly a bad thing. The developers at Perchang made a lot of excellent turn-based strategy games at their previous company Rodeo Games, and the *Hero Quest*-inspired *Warhammer Quest* might have been the best of the lot. It only makes sense, then, that the upgraded sequel deserves a spot on this list. As with *Heroes of Steel*, there's quite a bit of standard RPG mixed in here, but the battles and scenarios are truly grand.

XCOM: Enemy Within

XCOM: Enemy Within - iOS / Android Launch Trailer

[**XCOM®: Enemy Within, \\$4.99**](#) XCOM is one of the most famous brands in the tactical turn-based genre, but it seemed like a combination of mismanagement and financial issues had killed the series. Fortunately, 2K Games hooked the franchise up with Firaxis and let them make a true successor to the original games instead of a first-person shooter or what-have-you. The result was *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, and it was stunning. *XCOM: Enemy Within* is the expanded version of the game, and on iOS it replaced the release of the original. 2K Games isn't the most reliable of publishers on mobile, but the game is more than good enough to put up with their chicanery.

Again, this is just my personal list. If something you really love is missing, it's possible I forgot it or that I've ruled it out as a tactical RPG for one arbitrary reason or another. For example, *Ravenmark* ([**\\$9.99**](#)) is an incredible strategy game, but there's no leveling up or gathering of experience points involved.

That said, if you want to make the case for anything in particular, please leave it in the comments below. There's a good chance I'll be revisiting this list in the future to update it now and then.

That's all for this week. I'll be back next week with a **Classic Reload**. A gentle reminder that the **June 2017 RPG Reload Play-Along** is now the **June-July 2017 RPG Reload Play-Along** so that players could have a little extra time to clear *Final Fantasy 5* ([\\$14.99](#)). That means it's not too late to [join in on the thread](#) if you want to play with everyone! Oh, and if you're wondering what happened to the **RPG Reload File** on *Anodyne* that I mentioned last week, I've had to postpone it to a later date. *Somebody* was playing *Fire Emblem Echoes* all week in his free time. Very naughty. Sorry about that, and thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload: *Punch Quest* ([Free](#))